

Behaviour Support Information Sheet for an Individual on the Autistic Spectrum



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An OAASIS information Sheet

Office for Advice Assistance Support and Information on Special needs

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Having a better understanding of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) allows us to understand why negative behaviours may occur in a person with this condition. Only when we understand the reason behind the behaviour can we help a person with ASD to develop strategies in order that they can behave in a more acceptable way. Quite often we hear the saying 'There was no reason for that behaviour' but that is rarely the reality. There will be a reason – it is just that we may not know what it is and therefore we may have to initially do some detective work to find out what led up to the negative behaviour, to find the antecedent.

Understanding behaviour

The person with ASD may not be able to tell us why they are upset due to lack of communication skills or they may lack 'Theory of Mind' and believe that because they know why they are cross that we know as well. Once we have done our detective work we can help the person with understanding what happened and help prepare them with suitable strategies should the same, or similar thing, happen in the future. There is often a catalogue of events that have built up, which the person has been able to deal with at the time, but gradually, there may be one issue that is the final thing that makes them lose self control. This is similar to a firework, in that there is a trigger – the match; the fuse – the escalation phase; and finally the explosion – the outburst. Something else to remember is that people with ASD do not intuitively pick up appropriate ways to behave by watching others behaviours and therefore they may genuinely not know any other way to express their upset other than to have a negative outburst, whether that is verbally or physically. Therefore, we need to be able to help them develop strategies to be able to react more appropriately when upset.

Monitoring

By monitoring behaviours we can see if there are any patterns to why the behaviour may be occurring, for example certain times, places, people the child is with etc. To do this we can record the time, day, activity, person the child was with, where they were, the behaviour and what happened afterwards. Over a period of several weeks patterns can be noted, strategies devised and hopefully negative behaviours reduced. You can devise your own record sheet and record the information you want to monitor. Once you have monitored behaviours it may be best to deal with the behaviour that is giving the most concern.

Boundaries

Children with ASD can benefit from having clear and firm boundaries in order for them to feel safe. Many children push these boundaries to their limits but they often want the boundaries to be enforced – knowing that someone else is actually in control. In order for this to happen anyone dealing with the person will need to be firm, fair and consistent. If they are not, it can be confusing for a person with ASD which can lead to them exhibiting negative and challenging behaviours. If you, or another person, disagree about the boundaries and rules it is important

that the person with ASD does not know this as it could cause their anxieties to rise and therefore it would be better to discuss the rules/boundaries privately with the other person and agree on what the boundaries will be. This may need someone to compromise.

Rules

The rules of the house/school may need to be written in clear, brief, language and displayed where the child can see (and often laminated as they may tear them up when cross). They may also need to have these explained to them verbally and have their understanding of them checked. So, for an example, the rules may be:

- No Swearing
- Be gentle to yourself and others
- Take care of property
- Do talk about it

Different homes

If parents live in different houses the child needs to understand that the rules for each house may be different and that this is okay. However, they will need to know what the rules of each house are and therefore may benefit from having them written down, so they can see them, at each house.

Checking understanding

Quite often someone with ASD can repeat verbatim what someone has said to them, giving the impression that they have understood what was said. However, if they are then asked 'What does that mean?' they often do not know or answer with something quite bizarre. Therefore, it is important to check they have fully understood what has been said and get them to answer in their own words. Children with ASD can take longer to process information and therefore need to be given time when asked a question or given an instruction before they answer or carry out the instruction. If we try to rush their answer or demand them to carry out the instruction before they have had time to process the information they may become anxious which can result in negative behaviours. Allowing about 4 seconds for them to process the information would not be unreasonable, but each person with ASD is different and therefore they may need more or less time.

Breaking tasks down

Often, as people with ASD can be academically able, it is assumed that they understand when they are asked to do something. However, they

may not and may need it breaking down for them into smaller, achievable chunks in order that they do not become disheartened with the amount they have to do. Therefore it is important that their understanding is checked about what their task is. This may need to be done visually - with a list or by using a visual timetable. Some tasks that they may need breaking down can include:

- how to have a bath/shower – what they need to take into the bathroom as well as the actual process of bathing/showering
- how to get dressed, starting with socks, pants etc
- how to tidy a bedroom – what to put where, from start to finish
- how to make a sandwich, including clearing up afterwards

Self esteem/Seeking perfection

Many children with ASD seek perfection in everything they do, often comparing themselves to others and disliking making mistakes. Sometimes, they will avoid doing tasks they feel they may not be able to complete without making errors – by not doing the work, they cannot make a mistake. They often set themselves very high standards and often goals which they are unable to achieve, such as completing a piece of school work with no mistakes. When they then don't achieve it they spiral into the false belief that they are hopeless. The same can be said of some of these children regarding sports and games – many are not aware of the rules of playground games and things like football could be extremely difficult for them to understand. Although football has rules, they can change depending who plays. Children with ASD can also be egocentric and therefore cannot comprehend that the ball may not always be passed to them, causing huge anxieties when it is not. Added to that is the fact they may have difficulties with maintaining and keeping friendships, possibly being bullied for being different and often not understanding the work/task they have to do. Children with ASD often have their negative points mentioned, possibly because sometimes they can be extreme, particularly with some behaviours, but they actually do a lot of really positive things throughout the day which often go unnoticed. Therefore it is important that these times are recognised. For example, if a child starts to play a game of football but then storms off the field it can be seen, by some, that they have failed again. However, what people may not

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have noticed is that this time they stayed on the pitch for 4 minutes longer than the last time. For these children's self esteem to have any chance of improving they need to know that people are recognising their efforts.

Strategies

Children with ASD often get very anxious and can go into 'meltdown'. The idea is to put strategies in place beforehand so that they do not get so anxious that they are temporarily unable to function properly. However, it is important to understand and accept that this is not always possible but strategies need to be available when this does happen. Giving a child a 'safe place' to go when they are getting agitated can help but they may need a calm, verbal reminder to do this. The safe place could be a bean bag, a pop-up tent for a child, a certain seat, somewhere in the garden/playground, a desk or chair outside the classroom or, for younger children, a small mat in the classroom, preferably where they are not watched by other children. It is important for the child to learn that they take themselves to their safe place so that they are able to manage their own behaviour.

Exercise

Children with ASD can be physically aggressive and/or can go from seemingly very calm to very aggressive in a matter of seconds. If you can imagine a scale from 1 – 10, with 1 being calm and 10 being really angry and at full aggressive mode, then these children can go from a 1 to a 10 in seconds. The scale of behaviour gets progressively worse as the levels get higher. At a level 7, the child has lost self control and is not capable of controlling their behaviour on demand but may not yet have reached their full aggressive/disruptive peak. The idea of building in regular daily exercise into their routine is that by getting rid of some of their energy, when the child does have an aggressive outburst they go in at a level 6, giving people working with them more time to redirect them or talk them down. Once a child has reached a level 7 or above, anything you say to them will be futile as they are unable to process it. Shouting at them will do nothing to improve their behaviour because they are incapable of understanding anything at this stage.

Discussing behaviours – your version and theirs

Once the person is calm after an incident, it is important to discuss what happened with them in a positive way so that you can both understand why it happened and learn ways to try and prevent it happening again. It may be at least an hour and a half before they can fully understand what is being said to them again but when you do talk to them it is important to try to speak calmly and try to find out what caused their anxiety levels to raise – often their idea of what happened is totally different to what we have thought the problem was and it is

important to keep in mind that children with ASD view things differently to the majority. This does not mean that their version of events is wrong, merely different. Pretending the behaviour did not happen so as to avoid any further confrontation is not helping the child develop their behaviour management. If they are to become an acceptable member of society they will have to take ownership of their behaviours.

Rewards

Reward systems can work if they are clear, consistent, achievable and have a reward the person wants to earn. You decide on the behaviour you want to target, so for example it could be reducing physical aggression but it needs to be achievable for the child and manageable by either school or home. The idea is that you are rewarding them for their positive behaviour (not being aggressive) on a regular basis, and by using a visual reward chart. If they are likely to tear this up, it may be worth laminating it. A certain amount of stickers will earn them a reward which you both agree on. If they show physical aggression, deal with the behaviour as you normally would but do not make a fuss of the fact they have not earned the sticker, just encourage them to earn the next one. It may be that initially you need to make the reward easier to achieve such as per day rather than a whole week. Once they have earned a sticker/reward it should not be taken away for poor behaviour. Some children will say they don't want to earn their reward but this is often when they know they have not earned a sticker towards it. We would advise that if this is the case, you continue to reward positive behaviour so they do earn the reward. Rewards do not have to be expensive – they could be extra time on the computer/tv, a trip to the park, extra 1:1 time with you, a comic/magazine, a baking activity etc.

BOOKS

Working with Asperger Syndrome in the Classroom

by Gill D Ansell is also a useful resource for parents wanting strategies for home use.
ISBN 978-1849051569

Volcano in my Tummy

by Eliane Whitehouse and Warwick Pudney Helping children to handle anger – a resource book for parents, carers, teachers.
ISBN 978-0865713499

The Red Beast – controlling anger in children with Asperger Syndrome

by K I Al Ghani
ISBN 978-1-84310-943-3

The above and other books are available from various publishers and book websites.

Download the OASIS information sheet

'Books – where to find them'

USEFUL CONTACTS

Champion Behaviours

Is a charity set up to deliver motivational workshops to young people aged 11-16 in danger of being excluded from school and society. Based in Hampshire.

Website: www.championbehaviours.com

Tel: 01590 689 289

Email: info@championbehaviours.com

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

Advice to parents/carers of children with Severe Learning Difficulties.

Website: www.thecbf.org.uk

Family Support Line: 0845 602 7885

General Enquiries: 01634 838739

Family Lives

A national charity set up to offer help, support, practical solution, publications to anyone parenting a child from 0-18+ years on any issues e.g. challenging behaviour, emotional wellbeing, teenagers etc.

Website: www.familylives.org.uk

Tel: (24 hours a day) 0800 800 2222

The National Autistic Society has information about behaviours on their website.

Website: www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/understanding-behaviour/behaviour-guidelines.aspx

Youth Access

Signposting information service offering: advice; counselling and support services by letter, telephone, fax or email throughout the U.K. to young people. Search their online directory of 300 U.K. agencies to find local support in your area.

Website: www.youthaccess.org.uk

Helpline: 020 8772 9900

Cambian Group who support OASIS, run Outstanding residential special schools, colleges and homes for children, young people and adults with autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger Syndrome/HFA, severe learning difficulties. OASIS can give you advice and send you their prospectuses and information. Please contact OASIS.

OASIS produces a wide range of free Information Sheets, 8 publications entitled 'First Guide to...' and wallet sized cards explaining 9 learning disabilities.

Please contact OASIS (see front of sheet for contact details) for the full list, or view and download them on the website at www.oasis.co.uk.

All sheets are checked and amended annually. Please ensure you have the current version.

Note: The OASIS Information Sheets use 'he' 'his' 'him' rather than the cumbersome 'he/she' 'his/her' 'him/her'. No sexism is intended. The sheets are checked annually; please ensure you have the current version.

CAM096, Date of preparation 23/05/2011 © OASIS/Behaviour Support © OASIS 05/2011



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